

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 18213

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, UR, XF
SUBJECT: SOVIET VIEWS ON ME AND PLO

1. SUMMARY. I PAID COURTESY CALL ON M.D. SYTENKO, CHIEF OF THE MFA NEAR EASTERN COUNTRIES DIVISION, DECEMBER 4 (I HAVE KNOWN SYTENKO FOR SOME TIME BUT NEVER CALLED ON HIM FORMALLY). IN AN HOUR-LONG CONVERSATION I RECEIVED SYTENKO'S VIEWS ON THE PLO AND THE GENERAL ME SITUATION. SYTENKO SAID THE SOVIETS BELIEVE THE PLO IS TAKING A MORE "REALISTIC" POSITION TOWARD A SETTLEMENT IN THE ME AND THE SOVIETS BELIEVE IT IS POSSIBLE FOR ARAFAT TO GO TO GENEVA. HE STRONGLY IMPLIED THAT MOSCOW IS ENCOURAGING THE PLO TO MOVE FURTHER TOWARD MODERATION, WHICH HE CONTRASTED WITH ISRAELI INTRANSIGENCE. ON THE BASIS FOR A SETTLEMENT, SYTENKO REAFFIRMED SOVIET SUPPORT FOR A TERRITORIAL ARRANGEMENT BASED ON ISRAEL'S PRE-JUNE 1967 BORDERS AND SUGGESTED THAT THE PALESTINIAN "HOME" COULD BE ON THE WEST BANK AND IN GAZA. IN DISCUSSING ARAFAT'S VISIT SYTENKO SAID THE PLO HAS MADE NO DECISION REGARDING FORMATION OF A GOVERNMENT-IN-EXILE, BUT TOLD ME THE PLO WILL OPEN ITS MOSCOW OFFICE SHORTLY. SYTENKO SEEMED GENUINELY CONCERNED ABOUT THE ME SITUATION, AND HE MADE A STRONG PLEA FOR JOINT U.S.-SOVIET ACTION TO "DO SOMETHING" ABOUT IT. HE PREDICTABLY MADE A FORCEFUL CASE FOR THE NEED TO RECONVENE THE GENEVA CONFERENCE, SAYING THE SOVIETS BELIEVE THAT UNLESS THERE IS MOVEMENT TOWARD A SETTLEMENT SOON, ANOTHER ME WAR IS A POSSIBILITY. END SUMMARY.

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2. SYTENKO SAID THERE WAS NOT MUCH NEW REGARDING THE PLO SINCE ARAFAT'S VISIT HERE LAST SUMMER. HOWEVER, AFTER RABAT AND THE UN PALESTINE DEBATE, IT WAS CLEAR THAT ONE CANNOT GET A ME SETTLEMENT WITHOUT SOLVING THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM. WHEN I SUGGESTED THAT ARAFAT'S UN SPEECH HAD SEEMED EXTREME, SYTENKO RESPONDED THAT, ON THE CONTRARY, IT SEEMED TO THE SOVIETS THAT THE PLO WAS BECOMING MORE REALISTIC (HE NOTED THE EXAMPLE OF ARAFAT'S STAND AGAINST THE TUNIS HIJACKING). IMPLYING THAT MOSCOW IS MAKING AN EFFORT TO ENCOURAGE THE PLO TO BE MODERATE DESPITE THE POLITICAL PROBLEMS THIS SOMETIMES CAUSES IN SOVIET-ARAB RELATIONS, SYTENKO MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE SOVIETS ARE NOT WILLING TO SUPPORT PLO EXTREMIST POSITIONS. HE SAID MOSCOW FINDS IT HARD TO TELL THE PALESTINIANS "THEY ARE WRONG." BUT WHEN THE Y ARGUE THAT THE UN RESOLUTIONS OF 1947 WERE UNJUST IN VIEW OF THE TRADITIONAL PALESTINIAN RIGHT TO THEIR HOME OR THAT SC RESOLUTION 242 IS UNFAIR BECAUSE IT ADDED AN ADDITIONAL 6,500 SQ. KM. OF PALESTINIAN TERRITORY TO ISRAEL, THE SOVIETS "DO NOT ACCEPT" THEIR POSITIONS.

3. ON THE OTHER HAND SYTENKO ATTRIBUTED AT LEAST PART OF THE PALESTINIANS' EXTREMEISM TO ISRAELI INTRANSIGENCE (AND BY IMPLICATION TO THE U.S.'S REFUSAL TO PRESSURE ISRAEL TO ACCEPT A "REALISTIC" POLICY). SYTENKO RECALLED THAT FOR A LONG PERIOD ISRAEL MAINTAINED THAT IF THE ARABS WOULD AGREE TO NEGOTIATE, ALL THE ME PROBLEMS COULD BE RESOLVED. BUT, WHEN EGYPT RESPONDED POSITIVELY TO THE JARRING MEMORANDUM AND AGREED TO NEGOTIATIONS, IT WAS THE ISRAELIS WHO REFUSED. THIS PRODUCED A DANGEROUS SITUATION IN WHICH THE SOVIETS WARNED THE U.S. THAT THERE COULD BE WAR. THE U.S. IGNORED THESE WARNINGS, WAR BROKE OUT IN 1973, AND THE U.S. AND USSR HAD TO MAKE "GREAT EFFORTS" TO PUT IT DOWN. YET DESPITE THE RESULTS OF THE OCTOBER WAR, ISRAEL'S POLICIES ARE EVEN MORE RIGID. ISRAELI LEADERS HAVE ENGAGED IN AN ARMS BUILD UP, CARRIED OUT MOBILIZATIONS, AND IN CONTRAST TO A MOVEMENT TOWARD REALISM ON THE ARAB SIDE

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"HAVE NOT TAKEN ONE STEP." INSTEAD ISRAEL HAS REFUSED TO LEAVE ALL THE LANDS OCCUPIED IN 1967, TO TALK WITH THE PLO, AND TO ALLOW A PALESTINIAN STATE. IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES, SYTENKO SAID, HOW CAN ARAFAT BE EXPECTED TO TALK DIFFERENTLY?

4. ASKED ABOUT ARAFAT'S REPORTED ENDORSEMENT OF BREZHNEV'S ULAN BATOR FORMULA ON AN ME SETTLEMENT,

SYTENKO SAID THE PLO HAD NOT DISCUSSED THE ULAN BATOR SPEECH. HOWEVER, AS THE SOVIETS SAW THE SITUATION, THE KEY TO MOVEMENT IS REALISM ON BOTH SIDES IN THE ME. IN THIS CONNECTION SYTENKO SAID THE SOVIETS VIEW ISRAEL'S "DEMAND FOR EVERYTHING" FROM THE ARABS (E.G. RECOGNITION, DIPLOMATIC TIES, TRADE, TOURISM ETC.) AS UNREALISTIC. THESE THINGS ARE THE "RIGHT OF SOVEREIGN STATES TO GIVE" AND CANNOT BE IMPOSED. MOSCOW BELIEVES THAT ISRAEL SHOULD SEEK A SETTLEMENT WHICH WOULD INCLUDE RECOGNITION OF ISRAEL'S BORDERS ON THE FRONTIERS WHICH EXISTED IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO THE JUNE 1967 WAR. THERE SHOULD NOT BE EVEN "SMALL ADJUSTMENTS" IN THE 1967 BOUNDARIES, BECAUSE THIS WOULD BE DANGEROUS. IF ISRAEL WERE TO BE GIVEN MORE THAN ALLOWED UNDER RESOLUTION 242, "YOU WOULD GIVE AMMUNITION TO THE EXTREMISTS," WHILE SMALL AREAS WOULD NOT GIVE ISRAEL GREATER SECURITY. ISRAEL WILL HAVE SECURITY ONLY BY WITHDRAWING TO THE 1967 FRONTIERS WHICH COULD BECOME GUARANTEED "INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED BORDERS."

5. IN THE ABOVE CONTEXT I ASKED SYTENKO FOR HIS VIEWS ABOUT A PALESTINIAN STATE AND FOR CLARIFICATION OF THE TERMS "NATIONAL HOME" (OCHAG) AND "STATEHOOD" (GOSUDARSTVENNOST). HE SAID THAT WHEN THE SOVIETS ARE CRITICIZED BY THE ARABS AND PALESTINIANS FOR SAYING THAT ISRAEL MUST NOT BE DESTROYED, THE SOVIETS SAY "THE PALESTINIANS HAVE A RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION, BUT SO DO THE ISRAELIS." AFTER WORLD WAR II THE JEWS WERE FIGHTING FOR "SELF-DETERMINATION AND A NATIONAL HOME." THEY RECEIVED BOTH AND THE USSR SUPPORTED THIS. HOWEVER, THE ISRAELIS THEN TRIED TO DEPRIVE THE PALESTINIANS OF THEIR HOME AND THE SOVIETS SEE THIS

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AS UNJUST. THE SOVIETS BELIEVE THE PALESTINIANS COULD HAVE A NATIONAL HOME ON THE WEST BANK AND GAZA WITHOUT DEPRIVING ISRAEL OF ITS RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION OR REALIZING PALESTINIAN RIGHTS AT JEWISH EXPENSE.

6. WHEN I ASKED ABOUT RUMORS THAT THE PLO WOULD FORM A GOVERNMENT-IN-EXILE, SYTENKO SHOWED NO ENTHUSIASM FOR THE IDEA, AND INDICATED THAT THE PLO ITSELF HAD NOT YET REACHED A DECISION ABOUT THE SUBJECT. RESTATING A REFRAIN WE HAVE HEARD FREQUENTLY FROM HIS DEPUTY PYRLIN, SYTENKO ATTRIBUTED THE IDEA OF AN EXILE GOVERNMENT TO SADAT. IN THE TALKS WITH ARAFAT THE SOVIETS HAD THE FEELING, HOWEVER, THAT THE PROBLEM HAS NOT BEEN RESOLVED AMONG THE PALESTINIANS THEMSELVES, ALTHOUGH THERE MAY NOW BE A MAJORITY FAVORING IT. THE SOVIET

ATTITUDE TOWARD A PLO GOVERNMENT WOULD DEPEND ON ITS PROGRAM AND COMPOSITION, BUT IN THE ABSENCE OF A CLEAR PLO DECISION, MOSCOW "HAS NO POSITION AND HAS TO SEE." I ASKED ABOUT THE PLO OFFICE IN MOSCOW AND SYTENKO CHARACTERIZED IT AS "A SORT OF REPRESENTATION." HE SAID THE STAFF WOULD BE THREE OR FOUR PEOPLE AND THE OFFICE "WOULD PROBABLY BE ACCREDITED TO THE AFRO-ASIAN SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE." SYTENKO CONCLUDED THAT WITH A "BUREAU" HERE THE PLO WOULD BE MORE ACTIVE.

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ACTION SS-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MOSCOW 18213

EXDIS

7. I ALSO ASKED SYTENKO ABOUT SOVIET IMPRESSIONS REGARDING THE PLO'S ABILITY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE GENEVA CONFERENCE. HE SAID IT WAS "NOW IMPOSSIBLE TO RENEW THE GENEVA CONFERENCE WITHOUT THE PALESTINIANS." ARAFAT WAS NOT SPECIFIC ABOUT THE MEPC DURING HIS TALKS. HE SAID THE SUBJECT WOULD BE DISCUSSED AT THE UPCOMING MEETING BETWEEN THE PLO, EGYPT, SYRIA AND JORDAN. THE SOVIETS FELT, NONETHELESS, THAT THE PALESTINIANS "COULD GO, BUT NOT ON THE BASIS OF SC RESOLUTION 242." WHEN I ASKED WHETHER ARAFAT HAD INDICATED HOW THE PALESTINIANS WOULD TAKE PART IN GENEVA, SYTENKO SAID THEY WOULD PREFER AN "INDEPENDENT PRESENCE," BUT THAT THERE IS AN "IDEA ABOUT FORMING ONE ARAB DELEGATION." THE SOVIETS BELIEVE THAT THE PLO WOULD NOT GO TO GENEVA UNDER JORDANIAN AUSPICES. HOWEVER, ARAFAT HAD EMPHASIZED THAT ALL OF THESE QUESTIONS HAD TO BE DISCUSSED AT THE ARAB LEADERS' MEETING.

8. SYTENKO CONCLUDED THE CONVERSATION WITH A STRONG PLEA FOR JOINT U.S.-SOVIET ACTION TO "DO SOMETHING" ABOUT THE ME AND TO GET THE GENEVA CONFERENCE GOING AGAIN. HE SAID THAT IF THE U. . CONTINUES TO PURSUE ITS STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH, THE SOVIETS ARE AFRAID OF ANOTHER WAR. CLAIMING THAT THE U.S. APPROACH IS ALREADY CAUSING SUSPICION AMONG SOME ARABS WHO SEE DELAYS IN MOVING TOWARD A GENERAL SETTLEMENT AS BENEFITIING ISRAEL, SYTENKO SAID WHEN THE ARABS FEEL CONFIDENTIAL

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STRONGER, IT WILL BE EVEN MORE DIFFICULT. THE SOVIETS BELIEVE THE MEPC FRAMEWORK IS THE ONLY ONE IN WHICH PROGRESS IS POSSIBLE. THE CONFERENCE MAY ADDRESS ITSELF TO DIFFERENT TOPICS (E.G. FRONTIERS, INTERNATIONAL NAVIGATION, ETC.) ON A STEP-BY-STEP BASIS AND SOME ISSUES MIGHT BE SETTLED EARLY WHILE OTHERS ARE DELAYED. THE IMPORTANT THING WOULD BE TO HAVE ALL SOLUTIONS "ORGANICALLY REALTED." BY CONTRAST, RELIANCE ON "PARTIAL SOLUTIONS" (A PRESUMED REFERENCE TO PAST OR FUTURE LIMITED DISENGAGEMENTS) WILL ONLY EVOKE SUSPICION. THE KEY TO THE MATTER IS U.S.-SOVIET AGREEMENT. IF THE U.S. AND USSR AS CO-CHAIRMEN CAN AGREE THEY CAN "PUSH BOTH SIDES." I RESPONDED WITHOUT GOING INTO DETAILS THAT THE U.S. SEES A DANGER IN PUSHING THE PARTIES, THAT WE THOUGH THERE HAD BEEN PROGRESS IN THE ME, BUT THAT WE WOULD BE WILLING TO HAVE THE MEPC RECONVENE WHEN THE PARTIES AGREE.

9. SYTENKO SAID THE ALTERNATIVE TO RETURN TO GENEVA WAS DANGEROUS, ESPECIALLY FOR ISRAEL. HE SAID "THIS IS NOT 1947." NOW TIME IS WORKING FOR THE ARABS, THE REVERSE OF 1947. WITH THEIR INCREASING WEALTH "THE ARABS CAN GET WHAT THEY WANT, EVEN FROM YOUR MONOPOLIES." ISRAEL, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAS REACHED ITS PEAK; IT WILL NOT GO BEYOND THAT, AND MEANWHILE THE ARABS ARE CATCHING UP. ISAREL SHOULD NOW SEE ITS INTEREST IN RETURNING TO GENEVA WHERE IT CAN OBTAIN INTENATIONALLY RECOGNIZED AND GUARANTEED BORDERS. ISRAEL CANNOT HAVE EVERYTHING. SHE MUST BE HIGHLY REALISTIC AND UNDERSTAND THAT WITH AN AGREEMENT THE NORMALIZATION PROCESS WILL PROGRESS, WHILE WITHOUT IT WAR IS POSSIBLE.

10. COMMENT: SYTENKO'S REMARKS WERE CONSISTENT WITH WHAT WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD HERE IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ABOUT SOVIET VIEWS ON THE ME. ALTHOUGH DIPLOMATIC CIRCLES HERE HAVE RECENTLY BEEN SPECULATING ABOUT THE FIRMNESS OF THE SOVIETS' COMMITMENT TO OPPOSE PALESTINIAN EXTREMIST FORMULAS

FOR A ME SETTLEMENT AND TO STICK BY THEIR EARLIER SUPPORT
FOR A PEACE BASED ON ISRAEL'S 1967 BORDERS, SYTENKO
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GAVE NO HINT THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE ALTERED THEIR
ESTABLISHED POSITIONS. HE WAS, HOWEVER, MORE
DIRECT THAN MOST SOVIETS ABOUT MOSCOW'S THINKING
REGARDING THE DEFINITION OF PALESTINIAN RIGHTS
AND THE PARAMETERS OF A PALESTINIAN STATE. ON THE
ONE HAND, SYTENKO SEEMED TO BE OFFERING SOVIET
COOPERATION TO BRING THE PLO AROUND TO A REASONABLE
POSITION PROVIDING THE U.S. MAKES A SIMILAR EFFORT
WITH THE ISRAELIS. ON THE OTHER HAND, HE STRESSED
THE LIMITS OF SOVIET INFLUENCE WITH ARAFAT AND COMPANY
IN THE ABSENCE OF SOME MOVEMENT BY THE ISRAELIS TOWARD
ACCOMMODATION WITH THE PALESTINIANS. SYTENKO'S
EXPRESSION OF CONCERN AT THE GENERAL ME SITUATION,
OF COURSE, WAS DESIGNED TO URGE US TOWARD ACCEPTANCE
OF A SOVIET ROLE IN ACHIEVING SOME MOVEMENT ON A ME
SETTLEMENT AND REACTIVATING THE GENEVA FRAMEWORK.
NONETHELESS, HIS PRESENTATION -- WITH ITS ALLUSIONS
TO THE SITUATION BEFORE OCTOBER 1973 AND ITS SEVERAL
REFERENCES TO THE POSSIBILITY OF ANOTHER WAR UNLESS
PROGRESS IS ACHIEVED TOWARD A SETTLEMENT -- APPEARED
TO REFLECT A GENUINE FEELING OF CONCERN ON SYTENKO'S
PART THAT UNLESS THERE IS SOME PROGRESS, THE SITUATION
IN THE ME WILL GET MORE DIFFICULT TO CONTROL.

11. DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO ME POSTS AS APPROPRIATE.
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